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AIMS AND ILLUSTRATIONS IN PRACTICAL ETHICS.

My intention, in this paper, is to consider, in the first place, certain general aims in Practical Ethics, apropos of what Professor Sidgwick calls, in his latest book, "Practical Ethics," the "aims of the London Ethical Society," but which may now be described as the aims of "the Union of Ethical Societies." In connection with the general aims, I shall then give, at considerable length, examples of discrepancies between current ethical views and what I concede to be utilitarian morality. In a subsequent article, I intend to deal with obstacles in practical ethics.

I have explained elsewhere why I have allied myself to the utilitarian school of ethics, and, I may add, that, almost invariably, throughout this paper, I shall adhere to the terms "utilitarian" and "utilitarianism." I do not accept the objections urged against these terms; they are manifestly more convenient than the lengthy "universalistic hedonism"; while the mere hedonism alone, hedonic or hedonistic, although they may, with advantage, be used occasionally to vary the phraseology, are admittedly not sufficiently distinctive.

Referring to the "London Ethical Society," Professor Sidgwick writes: "The first and most important of the aims that we have stated is, 'To assist individual and social efforts after right living.'"

Well, this at once suggests the very big and difficult question—co-extensive with the whole of ethics—What *is* right living?

After enunciating the primary aim, Professor Sidgwick alludes to various obstacles that stand in the way of its fulfillment, and enlarges on the intellectual obstacles, as summed up in the phrase, "the imperfection of knowledge." Later on, however, in connection with what appears to be the second aim of the ethical society or societies, after explaining that he does not say "there is no important difference of opinion

amongst philosophers," with regard to "the details and particulars of morality," he contends that "it is, at any rate, not sufficient to prevent a broad, substantial agreement as to the practical ideal of a good life." He adds: "And I think that philosophers of the most diverse schools may combine on the basis of this broad and general agreement with each other, and with earnest and thoughtful persons who are not philosophers in their practical ideals."

While it may, no doubt, be said that there is a broad and substantial agreement among philosophers and others as to a considerable part of the practical ideal of a good life, in like manner, it may be maintained, that here, also, there is a wide and substantial disagreement. Indeed, such disagreement is involved in Professor Sidgwick's admission, in effect, that there is an important difference of opinion among philosophers with regard to the details and particulars of morality.

Again, although Professor Sidgwick informs us that it is one of the express principles of the "Ethical Society" that "the good life is to be realized by accepting and acting in the spirit of such common obligations as are enjoined by the relationship of family and society," he goes on to say that, "when we look closer at these common obligations, we find that they are actually determined by tradition and custom to so great an extent that, if we subtracted the traditional element, it would be very difficult to say what the spirit of the obligation was." He proceeds to refer to the historic change in the family relations, and afterwards writes: "When, then, from this historic survey we turn to scrutinize our own ideal of family duty, how are we to tell how much of it belongs to mere tradition, which the river of progress will sweep away, and how much belongs to the indestructible conditions of the well-being of life, propagated as human life must be propagated?" "The same, too," he remarks, "may be said of social relations—what social classes owe to each other, according to our commonly accepted ideal of morality, depends on traditions which result from a gradual development, are going through a process of change, and are actually assailed by doubts and controversies, often of a deep and far-reaching kind."

Surely all this seems to show that there is an aim which should take precedence of the aim of assisting efforts after right living, and that that aim may be put thus: To help to discover what *is* right living,—or what is wrong and wanting in the current conception of right living.

I have also to suggest an aim which may be taken in conjunction with, or as supplementary to the aims of helping to discover what is right living and of assisting efforts towards such living. It may be expressed as follows: By means of ample demonstration of how modes of conduct may respectively injure and benefit others, to try to foster, through the sympathies, the desire to do what is right.

A further aim of the "Ethical Society" is to "invite all its members 'to assist in constructing a Theory or Science of Right, which, starting with the reality and validity of moral distinctions, shall explain their mental and social origin, and connect them in a logical system of thought.' " Belonging, as this does, to the domain of theoretical ethics, it is beyond the scope of my paper. Nevertheless, I may observe that, to ask those members of an ethical society who have allied themselves to distinct and very different schools of ethics to co-operate in constructing a *Theory* of right, appears to me to propose an impossibility, if not an absurdity. Mr. Sidgwick seems to expect much from "sympathetic efforts at mutual understanding and interpenetration of ideas." But looking at actual facts, we find there is, as yet, hardly an approach to agreement upon fundamental points. And this aim is not presented as a vague future ideal, but as a proposal applicable to the present time. Again, with regard to inviting the so-called "plain man" to take part in the theoretical treatment of ethics—or any theoretical treatment that can be called science—surely this means to ask the unscientific to attempt scientific work, without scientific study. Even supposing it should be admitted that "the judgments of practical men as to what ought to be done in particular circumstances are often far sounder than the reasons they give for them," in the aim before us, it is not the practical conclusions, but the *reasons* that are required.

It may be supposed that the second aim of the ethical society,

not before stated,—“to free the current ideal of what is right from all that is merely traditional and self-contradictory, and thus to widen and perfect it”—practically amounts to the same thing as the aim of helping to discover what is right living. But I hold that the two are not identical. We have not simply to free the current ideal from what is traditional and self-contradictory: there is, in my opinion, a large amount of discrepancy, of different kinds, between it and a more correct or really utilitarian ideal, which would therefore to a considerable extent require to be remodelled, rather than merely widened and perfected.

To exemplify, let us return to the family relations, and after these have furnished us with a set of examples, we shall look for further instances to the social relations. My purpose being to emphasize my contention by bringing together a number of illustrations within a limited space, to refer systematically to the origin and growth of the family and social relations would, of course, be an impossibility. Nor do I intend to make any pronouncement as to changes that may occur in a future more or less remote.*

Proceeding to the family, we shall take first the relation of parenthood. That the duty of endeavoring to preserve health is very specially and in the highest degree obligatory upon those likely to become parents would certainly form part of a utilitarian morality, but it is not—or not to any marked extent—embodied in the current ethical ideal. Then, while popular opinion may be held to condemn the parenthood of those manifestly suffering, say, from tubercular or mental disease, it does not condemn that of many others who would rightly come under the category of the parentally unfit. As regards physical unfitness, I refer, for instance, to those who, while not actually

* I may also add that space does not permit allusion to more than a few of the objections that have been, or may be raised to the instances I mean to give: little more than an epitome of these examples is practicable. And, as regards illustrations, I intend to borrow from Spencer, while part of them—but only part of them, by his own admission—may have been derived from the teachings of Biology, they can all, I consider, be readily upheld from the standpoint of non-evolutional utilitarianism.

declared to be in consumption, have inherited a strongly consumptive taint, or have otherwise naturally poor constitutions and those who have become enfeebled by over-work, afflictions excesses, etc. It is hardly necessary to explain that it is of incalculable moment to human well-being that there should be an inheritance of, at least, fairly sound constitutions, and non-inheritance of unsound, or thoroughly enfeebled constitutions. As Mill argues in the "Liberty": "The fact of causing the existence of a human being is one of the most responsible actions in the range of human life. To undertake this responsibility—to bestow a life which may either be a curse or a blessing—unless the being on whom it is to be bestowed will have, at least, the ordinary chances of a desirable existence, is a crime against that being." He might have added—and a crime against society. Of mental unfitness for parenthood, apart from actual mental disease, there is hereditary tendency to insanity, such stupidity or incapacity as results, for example, in a man's proving himself to be an utter failure in whatever occupation he may have engaged, or, in the case of a woman who has never been a bread-winner, one who would justly be described as excessively or incorrigibly silly,—and who, I may add, is generally, if not nearly always specially prone to deceit. (That there is a wide experience in support of this idea is evidenced by the well-known Scotch saying: "Wiles help weak folk.") Finally, as to moral unfitness, the current ethics can scarcely be said to give a distinct veto against the procreation even of the convicted criminal and confirmed drunkard, and still less does it condemn that of those, for instance, who are notoriously shady in business transactions, and those known to be thoroughly unreliable as regards debts and obligations generally: in a word, the conspicuously dishonorable. A utilitarian ideal would begin with endeavor to lessen inherited weaknesses and evil tendencies by striving to promote a public opinion opposed to the multiplication of the weaklings and the unworthy. But such endeavor has no place amongst the duties of the ordinary or current ideal.

Again, the received ethics does not include the duty of limiting offspring, which, in utilitarian morality, would be im-

perative from different points of view. There is the pressure of population, an immensely important consideration when we take into account the many evils, physical, mental and moral, that spring from undue pressure. As an instance of a moral evil, I may mention Dr. Bain's having frequently remarked to me that, since he can recollect, there has been a large increase of manœuvring and untruthfulness in connection with appointments of all kinds; a result which he attributes mainly to excessive competition—*i. e.*, overcrowding. Again, while, of late, there has been much talk of the "demoralization of literature," little or nothing has been said as to what is certainly an essential factor in the case, and, indeed, may be called the first cause of whatever deterioration exists—excess of population forcing so many into literary as well as into other fields of work. Then, as Mill writes: "In a country either over-peopled, or threatened with being so, to produce children beyond a very small number, with the effect of reducing the reward of labor by their competition, is a serious offence against all who live by the remuneration of their labors." In respect of the children themselves, that the family should be very small is necessary in order that the parents may do anything like justice to each child. And as to the generality of the mothers of large families, in particular those of the poorer classes, when in addition to household duties otherwise, they try to attend properly, even to the more obvious wants of their children—apart from the laborious and most difficult task of adequate training—unless they are exceptionally strong, they cannot fail to be over-worked and more or less enfeebled. It has been popularly supposed that limitation of offspring was objected to by the evolutionary school; but let us note what Mr. Spencer writes in his latest volume on ethics. Referring to a future period, he speaks of the pressure of population being rendered small—"proximately by prudential restraints, and ultimately by decrease of fertility." The doctrine referred to is also frequently met by the argument that our pressure of population leads to colonization, and hence to extension of empire. Well, the counter arguments to this, of course, are, that we may be over-burdened with territory, that in "providing

new fields for our surplus population,"—as the phrase goes,—we may have weighted ourselves with an altogether excessive load of responsibility, and increased far too much the risks of war with all its horrors, and its terribly retrograde influence upon the course of civilization; moreover, that we have taken too little into account climatic effects upon races, and the fact that there are regions unsuitable for being inhabited by natives of our country. Once more, the younger members of large families, born when their parents have, to some extent at least, been weakened by the toil and troubles of life, are, for the most part, feebler physically than their older brothers and sisters, and therefore more likely to swell the ranks of the unfit.

Regarding the duties of parents to children, as compared with the current ideal, utilitarian ethics would prescribe a much more stringent acceptance of parental responsibility, in respect to the time and trouble given to the training of children. And it would more clearly enjoin the obtainment for them, by their parents, so far as possible, of a happy childhood, not only on account of the immediate gain of happiness at the period when there is least counteracting care, but also because the cultivation of susceptibilities to enjoyment is necessary for future happiness. On the other hand, it would condemn, much more emphatically, the over-indulgence of children, so common at the present time, and the procuring for them of elaborate and expensive enjoyments in place of simpler pleasures. As Mr. Spencer rightly argues, "a thoughtful beneficence will avoid a profuse ministration to childish desires," and will endeavor to initiate, at least something like a relation between the merits of the child's conduct and the benefits which he or she receives. Again, utilitarian morality would pronounce decisively against the undue bringing forward of children, and hence the undue fostering of self-confidence and self-assertion. Mr. Spencer enlarges on the duty of not showing favoritism in families, and the evil results which spring from undue partiality. But this duty is, I consider, sufficiently recognized in the current ideal, and does not, therefore, come within the range of my paper. What requires mention, however, is, that when the favoritism, so-called, consists merely in exhibiting a different

attitude to children whose conduct shows that they belong to higher and lower types of character, such behavior is not only defensible, but ethically desirable in the interest of the children. As to families of more mature years, a certain further divergence between the prevailing and a truer ethical opinion would consist in full appreciation of the duty of not allowing parental interference to go beyond advice or injunction—*i. e.*, not to extend to any manner of coercion in the important affairs of life, as, for instance, choice of a career and marriage selection. Again, as regards wealthy parents, whose means enable them to leave their children independent of a money-earning pursuit, utilitarianism requires that they should fit them for the performance of some useful social function, so that they may not be mere “consumers of things which others produce.”

Of matrimonial obligations, in later periods, there has undoubtedly been a large increase in the number of concessions made to wives. Nevertheless, as Mr. Spencer points out, in the received ethical views, there is no distinct perception of the fact that it is the duty of husbands to make certain compensations to their wives for the “antagonism between reproduction and individuation,”—their being more closely tied to home on account of the attention they have to give to children, with the consequent limitation of individual development, and the perturbations of health during the child-bearing period. Apropos of the health standpoint, I may add that the current ethics also fail to regard the duty incumbent upon both husband and wife—and upon relatives or friends living together—to make allowance for the depression and a certain amount of irritation which are the inevitable results of special forms of ailment, or general physical weakness, and also of great or very continuous worry. The prevailing morality enjoins upon us the duty of trying to be cheerful, or, at least, of displaying a calm fortitude in illness; but with respect to certain ailments, in particular, such injunction means asking impossibilities; while no consideration is given to the fact that to persons of highly strung nervous organization, suffering is far more unbearable than to those of coarser fibre. Moreover, as Dr. Bain observes in his essay, “Common Errors of the Mind,” “to

bid a man be habitually cheerful, he not being so already, is like bidding him treble his fortune, or add a cubit to his stature. The quality of a cheerful, buoyant temperament partly belongs to the original cast of the constitution—like the bone, the muscle, the power of memory, the aptitude for science or for music, and is partly the outcome of the whole manner of life.” As to the continuance of the marriage relation, the received ethics does not countenance any separation of husband and wife for reasons other than those that already suffice to bring about a legal dissolution of marriage. But the utilitarian ideal would include, for example, separation in cases of demoralization through intemperance; or where husband and wife discover after marriage that the moral endowment of the other is essentially defective—when either he or she may be described as thoroughly unreliable. For the person of average morality, and still more the man or woman of high moral character, to be constrained by public opinion to continue a union with one of low *morale* is a serious evil; and the evil is much increased when it involves responsibility for the existence of children inheriting a low moral endowment. I fully acknowledge the practical difficulties, say as regards the maintenance of a wife separating from her husband; but there ought to be, at least, a recognition of the fact that, so far as possible, attempts should be made to overcome these difficulties in the cases I refer to.

Of the duties of children to parents, the popular ideal, although not the popular practice, may be said to include great, if not the utmost attention and almost, if not quite, unflinching obedience to parents, with little or no recognition of the qualifications which utilitarianism, I consider, would steadily keep in view. These are, that the amount of attention and obedience—I mean, of course, as required from adult members of families—should, in great measure, be guided by the character of the parents, the reasonableness or unreasonableness of their demands, the strength and capabilities of the children, their duties otherwise, and their duties to themselves. Mr. Spencer would appear to have been solely impressed with the idea that the current conception of filial beneficence inadequately recog-

nizes the imperativeness of the "constant attentions, small kindnesses and manifestations of affection" due to parents; and particularly to aged parents, who would otherwise "suffer the weariness of monotonous days." No doubt, such devotion may be due to some, and perhaps to a very considerable number of parents, but certainly not to all, or anything approaching to all. To suppose so, would be to imagine that human beings, in becoming parents, underwent a character transformation. But I shall exemplify false exaction of filial duty countenanced by the current ideal. When the father or mother of an unmarried daughter becomes a chronic invalid, it is supposed to be the daughter's duty to devote herself to sick-nursing, whether she has or has not a turn for the work, although it should even prove extremely trying to her, and irrespective of what may be her aims and capacity otherwise, and the fact of her parents being able to afford hired nursing. I have before me two cases in which daughters died prematurely after being exhausted with a long period of nursing. To be responsible for a human existence, and when that existence is at its best as regards strength and capability, for the father or mother to make it subordinate to his or her comfort or convenience, when the parent's own powers of usefulness are either largely curtailed or have ceased altogether, is a mode of conduct which a hedonic morality would decisively condemn. Many other examples could be given of undue parental exaction—some to the extent of spoiling the life of a son or daughter. Like other virtues, filial duty can readily be carried to excess; and this fact requires to be fully understood.

As to further family obligations, in the meantime, I have merely to add that there is a general approval of assistance given by members of a family to one another, regardless of whether the assistance may involve encouragement to indolence and selfishness. The "bearing of one another's burdens" of the Christian ethics is often referred to as if the greater or more numerous the burdens to be borne, the greater would be the merit of the bearer. But, as Mr. Spencer has argued, to do too much for others not only means that fostering of indolence and selfishness already alluded to, but will, in all likelihood

prove more or less injurious to the health of the mistaken benefactor, and hence will curtail his future usefulness to himself and to others.

Before turning to instances from the social relations, it is perhaps well, though scarcely necessary to explain that it is not my purpose, in the meantime, to try to specify what section of persons are specially fitted, what class or classes specially unfitted, (having regard to individual circumstances, and natural constitution, physical, mental and moral), to promote the social changes which utilitarianism may enjoin. As I previously remarked, and have shown in my treatment of the family relations, my object simply is to illustrate points of difference between a utilitarian and the current conception of the duties of life. And as I also said in effect, these points of difference are merely with regard to the present conditions of life. It is impossible to speak with any approach to certainty of future conditions, and hence of modes of conduct affected by such conditions.

The current ethics may be held to approve of continuance in the customary lines of social intercourse and social procedure generally. But, as the individual assimilation, against which Mill uttered such a strong note of warning, has largely increased during the past forty years, deviation from custom, the example of non-conformity has become a more pressing need than it was even when his "Liberty" was written. To refuse to bend the knee to custom, when individual circumstances render the refusal at all practicable, would be in the forefront of utilitarian duties; in order to secure greater liberty of social action; to give more scope for that individual development indispensable to liberty and synonymous with progress; to obtain the immediately pleasurable, as well as the ultimately progressive effects of greater social liberty and increased individuality; to afford more encouragement to "efforts after right living"; because of the utility, in themselves, of varied social experiments. Unless it could be maintained that man had arrived at a state of perfection, and hence had established perfect modes of living, that it is necessary to make experiments in modes of living cannot possibly be gainsaid.

And the divergence from custom is not merely requisite for the reasons above stated, but also because so many of our social observances are in themselves, to be condemned from the ethical standpoint.

To go to specific cases. In the usual run of social entertainments among the upper and middle classes, so-called, there is far too much formalism, elaboration and display, and where the generality of middle-class hostesses are concerned, these entertainments involve an undue expenditure of money, time and labor, and far too much nerve strain, with results altogether disproportionate. In social intercourse, if we seek to work towards the utilitarian end, we should not merely avoid, as much as possible, formality and needless display, but, setting aside largely a variety of considerations at present paramount, should be guided mainly, in bringing people together, by what are the essential elements of pleasurable intercourse—*i. e.*, at least considerable similarity in interests and sympathies, and, at any rate, some approach to equality of culture and intellectual capacity. These words, and, indeed, the draft of nearly the whole of this part of my paper had been written before I read Mr. Leslie Stephen's "Social Rights and Duties," in which, *i. e.* in his essay on "Luxury," occurs the following sentence:—"The man whose pleasure in society is the genuine delight in a real interchange of thought and sympathy, who does not desire magnificent entertainment but the stimulus of intimate association with congenial friends, would probably find the highest pleasure in comparatively simple social strata where the display of wealth was no object, and men met, as Johnson met his friends at the club, to put mind fairly to mind, and to stimulate intellectual activity, instead of consuming the maximum of luxury." But *where* is the stratum in which social intercourse combines "high thinking" with "plain living," or, in other words, with no undue display in preparation for guests? I fear nowhere. In ascending from the working classes, each different social set may be described as imitating, or trying to imitate, the one immediately above it (in the conventional sense) with regard to formalism, display, snobbery, more or less general pretentiousness. Social life is directed by women; and not-

withstanding all that has been claimed for their progress in this country, in our generation, the present condition of our social intercourse—much more objectionable in point of pretentiousness than in the early part of the century—to me, at least, suggests doubts as to their advancement, on the whole. It may be said that increased purchasing power, widely diffused, naturally leads to a large increase of the means of display. To this it may be replied that real mental progress should certainly tend to check *irrational* display. The changes that actually result in greater comfort or convenience, and in what may be called legitimate regard for the æsthetic, are undoubtedly approvable; but, as I do not need to explain, it is the changes beyond these that we have to condemn.

In social intercourse, utilitarianism would also enjoin refusal to be influenced, to the usual extent, by notions of so-called politeness and courtesy. Greater general sincerity in social life is certainly to be aimed at; and in place of much polite insincerity in agreeing, or seeming to agree, in conversation, there should be more frequent expression of frank disagreement, not, of course, put forward aggressively, but with a due, and not undue, regard for the feelings of others. Insincere compliment should also be wholly eschewed. More social sincerity would, of course, mean less mutual distrust—less of the pain, watchfulness and disquietude born of distrust,—or, to put it otherwise, more mutual confidence, involving a gain of ease, freedom and general satisfaction. This holds good as regards, at any rate, the higher types of character. But even with the lower types, more frequent manifestations of candor, fewer manifestations of insincerity, could not fail to have some influence in the right direction.

We often hear praise bestowed upon those who are said to make themselves extremely agreeable to everyone. But being equally pleasant to persons who do not deserve to be esteemed and those worthy of respect, is to help to do away with the distinctions between right and wrong. Strict adherence to utilitarian ethics would, therefore, mean disregarding, at least so far, an erroneous social courtesy, and showing a distinct difference in manner to the estimable and to those whom we

actually know to be of bad moral character—*i. e.*, not persons whose faults only concern themselves directly, but persons who have shown cruelty to others, who have encroached upon the rights of others, or made unfair use of their advantages over others, the tyrannical and domineering, the revengeful, the thoroughly dishonorable, the intriguing and eminently deceitful. Those exhibiting such dispositions are, as Mill says, “fit subjects of disapprobation;” and, indeed, by persons possessing the opposite qualities, cannot fail to be regarded with strong distaste. It is no doubt well not to “needlessly” offend people; but to seem to be friendly to those who, in the interests of social morality, ought to be strongly reprobated, is, of course, a wholly different matter.

Another revolt against the popular ideas of politeness, countenanced by Mill from the hedonic standpoint, is that of a person’s “honestly pointing out to another that he thinks him in fault.” Mill meant it to be inferred that what he calls this “good office” should be rendered, not universally, but much more frequently than at present. If the reprover is right, the person reproved is afforded an opportunity for amending his fault, and, if he makes use of it, may thus be saved from the unfavorable opinion of others, and further disagreeable consequences in the future. If the reprover is wrong, he who is censured is able to set himself right in his censorer’s estimation, and, probably, in that of others also. I may add that such remonstrance is certainly desirable in the case of the broader-minded—who are least liable to take offence, and are capable of appreciating the advantages of the plain-speaking—but may not, perhaps, be expedient as applied to those on lower levels, intellectually.

In the name of good breeding, the expression of unpopular views is still largely suppressed in general society. But here we have an instance, not of legitimate regard for the feelings of others, but of illegitimate regard for the prejudices and intolerance of others. And what of the feelings of the holders of the unpopular views, who may have been rendered specially sensitive by more or less experience of social buffeting? Disregard of *their* feelings is rarely if ever denounced in the name

of good-breeding. In an admirable article on "The Ethics of Intellectual Life and Work," which appeared in the *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ETHICS* for April, 1899, Dr. Fowler, of Oxford, writes:—"Orthodoxy, and that not in ecclesiastical matters only, still holds in her hands rewards and punishments which are sufficient to deter the wary, the timid and the ambitious from venturing too far, on their own account, in the independent search for truth." And the restrictions of orthodoxy are felt, in an especial manner, as regards the expression of opinion in social intercourse. President Fowler remarks that "we are not bound to obtrude our opinions upon others, nor, unless we thought it were for their benefit, should we be justified in doing so." Again, I may put my former question, but in a somewhat different form, and ask—"What as to the obtrusion of orthodoxy upon the heterodox?" I do not, however, mean to approve of an altogether indiscriminate expression of opinion. On the other hand, judging from my own experience of the promulgation of heterodox opinions, I do not entertain the fears mentioned by Dr. Fowler as to the production of "an unintelligent and indiscriminating scepticism," or the conduct of life being prejudicially affected by the upsetting of old convictions. A much freer expression of unpopular or unorthodox views would certainly, I consider, be "for the benefit" of others, inasmuch as it would tend largely to the enlightenment of the average person, the increase of toleration and hence the decrease of injustice to others; the spread of truth—through sources, for instance, exhaustively described by Mill in his "Liberty"—and the furtherance of social sincerity. And thus regarded, such freer expression is, I would urge, a part of the utilitarian ideal the importance of which can scarcely be overestimated. From "Liberty of Thought," "it is impossible," Mill observes, "to separate the cognate liberty of *speaking* and of writing." And how to try to combat, at least part of the difficulties which stand in the way of greater freedom of expression in social life, I hope to discuss in a future paper.

Undue display, in addition to being so largely prevalent in social entertainment, is also very conspicuous in house decoration and in the adornment of women. Here, too, hedonic

morality requires a departure from custom unknown to the popular ideal. Mr. Spencer is almost, if not entirely, justified when he remarks that "time among the women of the upper and middle ranks is largely and often mainly spent in pursuit of the ornamental. To make things look pretty seems to have become with them the chief end of life, and they never ask whether there is any proper limit to æsthetic gratifications." He goes on to speak of perversion of mind and bodily injury resulting from the "insane subordination of reality to show." Mr. Spencer adds that this state of matters is not only "to be ethically disapproved as putting the less important ends of life before the more important ends," but "is even to be æsthetically disapproved" inasmuch as it "defeats itself": a more modified in place of excessive ornamentation being really more artistic and more beautiful.

The present undue pursuit of the æsthetic may, in some measure, be attributable to the writings of Mr. Ruskin. We have to recollect, however, that, with a great many women, it is not the outcome of any distinct views upon art, or of either natural or acquired love of the beautiful, but merely the desire, on the part of Mrs. Brown, not to be outdone by, or to excel Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Robinson. And to blame her for this is to blame average human nature for not being exceptional human nature. It is the highly reprehensible custom or fashion, or rather those who can be held responsible for the fashion becoming a fashion, that we must inveigh against. But having regard to this excessive devotion to the æsthetic, at the present time, it is disappointing to read certain remarks made by Professor Sidgwick in the "Practical Ethics." He goes so far as not only to condone, but even approve of what he describes as the "luxury of the few amid the hard lives of the many," because the costly expenditure of the rich affords adequate opportunity for "the cultivation and satisfaction of æsthetic sensibilities," and thus provides "new sources of high and refined delight." No doubt Mr. Sidgwick had in view the really beautiful, and actual—not sham—æsthetic sensibilities; and, in addition to the æsthetic in furniture and ornamental buildings (he makes no mention of the old china, curios, etc., of ladies'

drawing-rooms) he refers to literature regarded as a fine art, music and the drama, paintings and sculptures, flowers, trees and landscape-gardening of all kinds. As a matter of fact, however, we know that great riches lead to excess of ornamentation and undue display in all its phases. In his "Political Economy," Mill expresses the opinion that immense fortunes are not needed "for any personal purpose but *ostentation* or improper power." To me, it appears that moderate expenditure concentrated upon fewer objects of ornamentation, but those that are really artistic, combined with access to public gardens art galleries, museums, etc., could sufficiently satisfy æsthetic sensibilities; although the increased "public and collective effort" in this direction, which Mr. Sidgwick contemplates as a possible future substitute for costly private expenditure, might perhaps be desirable. If Professor Sidgwick's remarks had been made at an earlier period than the present, they could, so far, at any rate, have been regarded in a different light. But when pursuit of the æsthetic, or what is supposed to be the æsthetic, has come to occupy an altogether undue amount of time, and to be very widespread, consequently involving a considerable, perhaps large, curtailment of general happiness, this pronouncement coming from Mr. Sidgwick seems very regrettable and surprising. Still more does it appear so when we look at the question from another point of view. The inordinate social value attached to the possession of wealth, purely as wealth—*i. e.*, irrespective of how it may have been obtained, or what are the characters of its possessors—is largely due to the riches affording opportunities for lavish display in its many forms. Hence, to try to cultivate a force of opinion against excessive elaboration and needless display, and in favor of general simplification, reaches a further and high point of importance as a utilitarian aim in helping to lessen the temptation to social mammon-worship, which, the more we consider its direct and indirect effects, the more, I hold, must we deem ethically condemnable.

Of less important, but still, from the hedonic standpoint, very objectionable, social customs, on which Mr. Spencer comments disapprovingly, are the giving of marriage presents to the ex-

tent that these have come to be expected, and also over-elaborate funerals. Marriage presents are bestowed most lavishly upon the wealthy and those in no need of assistance, and, save by the few friends who really wish to bestow them, are given more or less grudgingly, and as Mr. Spencer remarks, to avoid unfavorable criticism—in the first place, on the part of those immediately concerned, and afterwards that of others, when the presents and the donor's names come to be ostentatiously exhibited, or, what is worse, published in the newspapers. As to extravagant outlay or needless display at funerals, these serve to feed the vanity of the living, or are either a false adherence to custom, or the outcome of a mistaken idea of paying due respect to the dead. It is recognized, Mr. Spencer observes, that funeral expenses “weigh heavily on necessitous families”—and, we may add, weigh unnecessarily upon all those of small means. As he further argues, taking into consideration that “costly burial rites are equally accorded to the bad and to the good, they fail to be signs of respect; and were they generally abandoned, no slight would be implied by the absence of them.”*

Again, the custom of making calls, as practised by so many women of the upper and middle classes, is in a great measure a species of insincerity, in addition to involving a needless waste of time and trouble. To go to see those whom we know to be our real friends and those whom we find specially congenial to us is, of course, very right and even commendable. But to spend much time upon mere acquaintances, exemplifies insincerities in different directions; for instance, when a call is made in the hope that the person to be called on will not be at home; that of seeming to be specially interested in those in whom we have little or no real interest; and the greater insincerity of appearing to be friendly, not merely with those towards whom no actual liking is felt, but those who

* Apropos of burial rites, I may mention that I have long been in favor of cremation—for which, also, there are required simpler preparations which dispense with unnecessary outlay.

are regarded with positive dislike and in absence spoken of in very disparaging terms.

Proceeding to weightier social questions, I have to enlarge upon a far-reaching duty, not included in the current ethics, but certainly, I consider, prescribed by utilitarianism, and which might be expected from the more highly endowed, mentally and morally. That duty is to reject, not to take part in bestowing, and to show disapproval of undue or undeserved social distinctions and forms of homage; the willing acceptance of which displays insufficient altruistic feeling.

In his "Ceremonial Institutions," Mr. Spencer rightly says:—"With an increasing respect for others' claims, there goes a decreasing eagerness for distinctions which, by implication, subordinate them. Sounding titles, adulatory forms of address, humble obeisances, gorgeous costumes, badges, privileges of precedence and the like, severally minister to the desire to be regarded with actual or simulated admiration. But as fast as the wish to be exalted at the cost of humiliation to others is checked by sympathy, the appetite for marks of honor, becoming less keen, is satisfied with, and even prefers, more subdued indications of respect."

To these remarks I would add that, as selfishness may be called the arch-enemy of moral progress, what specially tends to the fostering of egoistic, at the expense of altruistic feeling, must be specially reprobated on ethical grounds.

I quoted, in an early part of my paper, Professor Sidgwick's admission that what social classes owe to each other depended on traditions, was "going through a process of change," and was "assailed by deep and far-reaching doubts and controversies." Amongst false distinctions, we may include a very considerable part of class subordination. To repudiate or ignore such real distinctions as the difference between the cultivated and the uncultivated, the refined and the unrefined, the highly cultivated and the partially cultivated, and so on, would be to remove the chief inducements to improvement from those who stand in need of it. But with the purely artificial distinctions, it is, of course, very different. Before turning to these, however, I wish to touch, in a word or two, upon the disproportion-

ate regard shown for a certain part of what is embraced by the term refinement. That in the higher social strata, good manners may be said to be almost indispensable, while much is excused in the way of recognized and pronounced moral and mental defects, is an instance of false social distinction; and the verdict of hedonism is in favor of attaching a greatly lessened value to mere manners, in particular, relatively, but also absolutely. Along with external refinement, there may, as we are all aware, be little or no real regard for the feelings of others—which may be described as the root or natural origin of what we call good breeding. On the other hand, for example, a certain *gaucherie* or want of ease and suavity of manner may be due solely to voluntary avoidance of general society; always more or less uncongenial to those whose tastes and aspirations differ widely from its own.

To go to purely artificial social distinctions—the not infrequent use of the words “snob” and “snobbery,” in connection with the court paid, say to titled or aristocratic personages, if merely on account of their titles or inherited social position, may seem to testify to the existence of a considerable amount of popular feeling opposed to unearned honoring. Yet this may be called a mere temporary or spasmodic ebullition of feeling on the part of a comparatively small section; and there is certainly no widely-held opinion that the doing honor or showing deference to those who have not earned for themselves any title to distinction is opposed to the furtherance of the social well-being. Nor could it be otherwise while, for instance, loyalty to a sovereign, *quâ* sovereign—*i. e.*, apart altogether from his or her actions and character—is still lauded as a virtue, and we still have with us the whole régime of status (which, as may be remembered, Mr. Spencer regards as a survival of the militant period, to be gradually superseded in the period of industrialism). Let us consider, first, evils resulting to those unduly honored. So long as the majority of their fellow-citizens treat them with the deference, and often much more than the deference, that they accord to distinguished men of science, they are provided with no adequate incentive to exertion. No doubt it may be said with truth, that there has been,

for some time, a growing feeling among the upper classes that idleness is blameworthy, and a growing tendency to engage in public duties, industrial pursuits, or whatever may be regarded as useful occupation; nevertheless, the life of a large proportion of the aristocracy, and of the non-aristocratic inheritors of large means, may still be called a "life of pleasure-hunting." And of it Mr. Spencer says, and I believe deservedly, in his "Study of Sociology," that "it fails because the appetite for egoistic enjoyments is satiated in times much shorter than our waking lives give us: leaving times that are either empty or spent in efforts to get enjoyment after desire has ceased." Large parts of the nature are left unexercised: there are wanting "the satisfactions gained by successful activity" and "the serene consciousness of services rendered to others." And all this results in "weariness and discontent." Moreover, along with the frequent acceptance of homage that has no claim to be the outcome of social service, there cannot exist, in those deferred to, any vigorous sense of justice—a virtue which societies ought not to starve, but assiduously nourish. Then let us look to the bestowers of the homage, to the multitude who pay court to those who are held to be of special social consequence, no matter how the consequence is derived. Just as independence and truthfulness of character go hand in hand with repugnance to undue adulation, so the taking part in acts of undeserved homage is antagonistic to the development of these high qualities, and conducive to the growth of opposed traits. Or, we may say, the frequent practice of this far-reaching species of social insincerity is, in an especial manner, calculated to render other social insincerities easier, more natural, more habitual; and from those thus habituated, we can scarcely expect any robust moral action.

Another form of undeserved distinction, even more objectionable from the utilitarian standpoint, and which should therefore, I hold, be even more sedulously repudiated, is the bestowal of marks of honor upon those who have not merely failed to earn them, but have merited, on the contrary, emphatic social condemnation. I have before me two instances of men known to be thoroughly dishonorable in money matters,

who received a majority of votes from certain electoral bodies. And there was no widespread or popular denunciation of the results of the poll on account of the character of the victors: no recognition of the fact that, by honoring those who deserve to be dishonored, we are materially helping to lessen the inducements to virtuous conduct, or to put it otherwise, materially helping to *discourage* "efforts after right living."

I have considered social relations in a purely restricted sense of the phrase—which is convenient for a single paper. If space permitted, it would not be difficult to multiply instances from the social relations, and what may be called personal-social relations—*i. e.*, conduct more peculiarly personal, but having inevitable social effects. There is room, however, for reference to a special duty mentioned by Professor Sidgwick in the end of his essay on the "Aims" of an "Ethical Society" in his "Practical Ethics." The duty alluded to is that of acquiring knowledge which, as "an element of human good," is not, Mr. Sidgwick observes, "sufficiently recognized in our current moral ideal." Apropos of this allusion, I may instance, but merely mention without any enlargement, certain other intellectual duties—all of which are, at any rate, possible to the better endowed mentally—that have been ignored, or almost ignored in the current ideal. There is the duty of truth-seeking, akin to, but not, of course, identical with the duty of acquiring knowledge. There are duties with regard to certain types of literature, in the way of respectively encouraging and discouraging those types. And there are political duties, having reference to mental equipment, of a kind unknown to the average citizen, and scarcely recognized by statesmen.

But apart from these and all further and possible illustrations—the examples previously given sufficiently establish my main contention: that there is a large amount of discrepancy between the current estimate of the duties of life and that which would be sanctioned by utilitarianism.

B. BAIN.

ABERDEEN.